



News Release

Office of the Louisiana State Fire Marshal
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HAVE A SAFE HOLIDAY Fireworks Safety Issues

The Office of the State Fire Marshal is encouraging families to attend **professional, public fireworks displays** this holiday season. Attending a public fireworks display this holiday is a safe way to honor our tradition, our shared values, and our hopes for a healthy future.

Permanent scarring, loss of vision, dismemberment – these are all too often the harsh realities of amateur fireworks use. The State Fire Marshal's Office is urging everyone to treat all fireworks as suitable only for use by trained professionals. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), amateur fireworks use endangers not only the users, but also bystanders and surrounding property and structures. Pyrotechnic devices ranging from sparklers to aerial rockets cause thousands of fires and serious injuries each year.

"Safe fireworks don't exist," stated Fire Marshal Paul Smith. "When things go wrong, they go wrong very fast, and often with disastrous consequences." In recent years, fireworks have been one of the leading causes of injuries serious enough to require hospital emergency room treatment. Fireworks can result in severe burns, fractures, scars, lifelong disfigurement or even death. The thousands of serious injuries each year typically harm the eyes, head, or hands and are mostly reported in states, such as Louisiana, where fireworks are legal. Even sparklers, which are considered by many to be harmless, reach temperatures in excess of 1200 degrees F.

Wooded areas, homes, and even automobiles have become engulfed in flames because of fireworks. Fireworks-related fires have typically caused at least \$21 million in property loss nationally (not adjusted for inflation) in recent years. A substantial portion of the structure fire property loss due to fireworks typically involves bottle rockets or other fireworks rockets/aerial devices. These rockets can land on rooftops or wedge within certain structures and still retain enough heat to cause a fire. "A family's home represents the work of a lifetime," said Mr. Smith. "Losing your home or having a family member seriously injured because of a fireworks accident would be disastrous. There are safer alternatives to using fireworks on the Fourth of July."

Public fireworks displays are one of those alternatives. Conducted by trained professionals, these displays are the smartest and safest fireworks alternative for everyone, because they are established under controlled settings and regulations. Clearly, fireworks are capable of devastating and fatal injuries. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), there are currently ten states that ban all consumer fireworks. "The fireworks banned in these states **do not** become safer when used in Louisiana or other states in which consumer fireworks can be legally purchased," states Fire Marshal Smith.

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To those citizens of the State who **do** intend to purchase and use fireworks during the upcoming holiday, the Fire Marshal's Office offers the following fireworks safety suggestions:

- Always read and follow the label directions carefully
- Always have a garden hose or water bucket nearby for medical emergencies and/or to douse spent or misfired fireworks.
- Adults should always supervise fireworks activity.
- Fireworks should be placed on a hard, smooth surface prior to ignition. **NEVER** light fireworks in your hand.
- Quickly light one firework at a time, and move away quickly after lighting.
- Never point or throw fireworks at people, pets, cars, or buildings
- Keep fireworks away from small children.
- Do not alter or make your own fireworks.

After displays, never pick up fireworks that may be left over. Fireworks that have been ignited and fail to immediately explode or discharge can cause injury, as they may still be active. Children should always tell an adult if they find fireworks rather than picking up smoking or charred fireworks themselves.

Public displays and retail sales are prohibited in the following parishes: St. Bernard, St. Charles, Orleans, East Baton Rouge, and Terrebonne.

Concerning age requirements, Fire Marshal Smith advised that state law prohibits anyone from offering to sell or selling fireworks to any child under the age of fifteen (15). Mr. Smith adds that parents may be held liable for any damages or injuries caused by their children's illegal use of fireworks. Mr. Smith further advised that anyone found selling fireworks without a proper permit from the Office of the State Fire Marshal will be ordered to "cease and desist" operations until a proper permit has been obtained and properly posted. Smith said that his deputies will be inspecting fireworks stands during the retail season to ensure they meet the minimum requirements for fire safety and registration.

Mr. Smith stressed that, due to the fire hazard as well as the inherent risk of injury involved in fireworks, citizens are urged to use extreme caution when handling fireworks to ensure a safe, fire-free holiday. "The few moments of pleasure consumer fireworks bring are not worth the risk of property loss, injury, or death. Avoid needless risks," said Fire Marshal Smith. "The alternative of a professionally-run public display is, in every way, superior in spectacle and safety."

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